DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 482 832 SP 041 804

TITLE	Using Data To Influence Classroom Decisions.
INSTITUTION	Department of Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2003-00-00
NOTE	4p.
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.ed.gov/teachers/nclbguide/datadriven.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; *Accountability; *Data Analysis; *Data Collection; Elementary Secondary Education; Equal Education; Evaluation Methods; Screening Tests; *Standardized Tests; State Standards; *Student Evaluation; Teacher Effectiveness
IDENTIFIERS	Dynamic Assessment; No Child Left Behind Act 2001

ABSTRACT

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) holds states, districts, and schools accountable for student achievement. NCLB requires regular assessments to mark progress and highlight weaknesses in core academic subjects. Assessment results must be reported in the aggregate and disaggregated by individual subgroups of students. Research shows that teachers who use student test performance to guide and improve their teaching are more effective than teachers who do not. While testing is an important part of measuring progress, how teachers use the data to drive instruction is critical. Standardized assessments are professionally developed tests administered under standard conditions, producing scores that can be used to evaluate programs or children. The type of standardized test required by NCLB determines whether children within a state are meeting state standards of learning for their grade and subject. Dynamic assessments are embedded in ongoing classroom instruction. Teachers assess individual students according to their instructional goals during teaching and learning interactions, using this information to tailor instruction to student needs and measure progress. Screening assessments are given to all children at the beginning of the class or school year. They identify children who may have difficulties in a subject area. Screening tests are short and involve questions that probe for the presence of basic skills and abilities. (SM)

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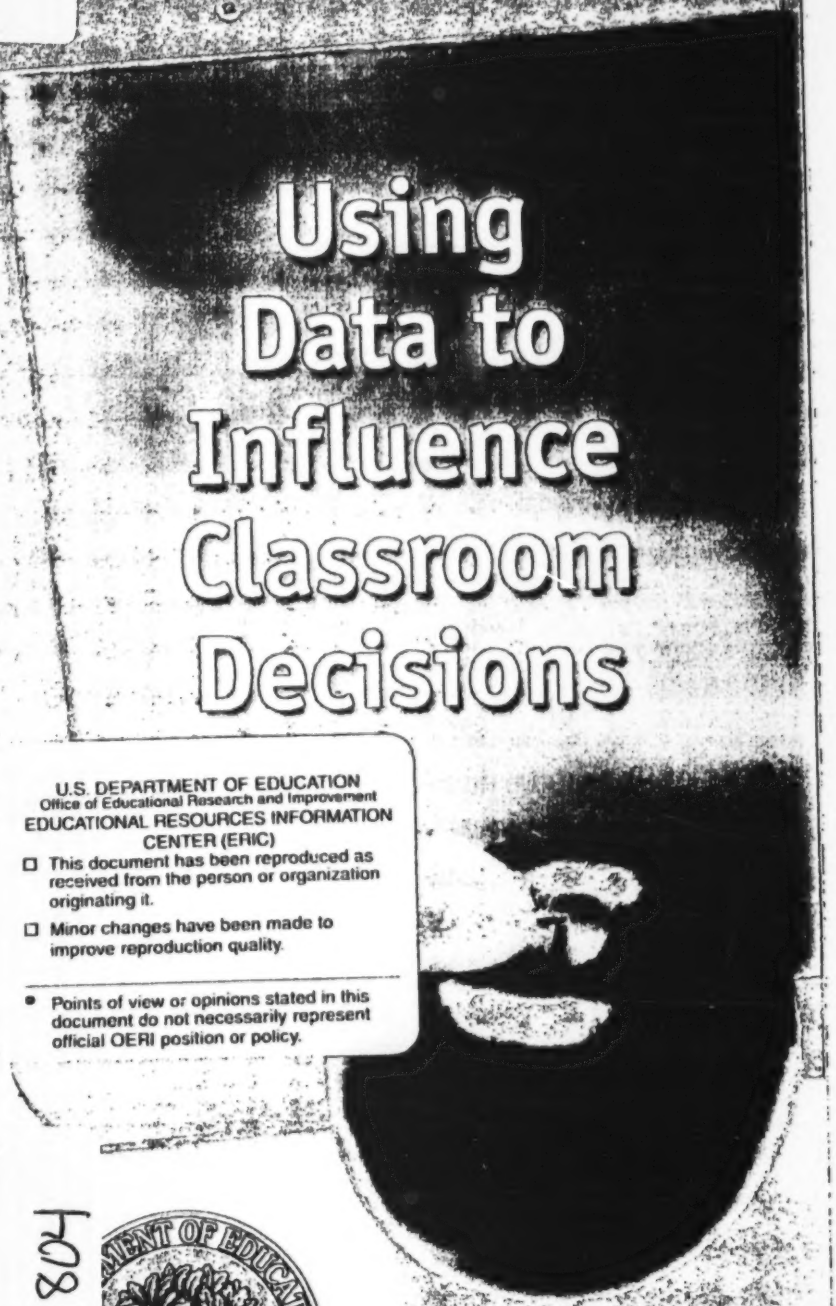
Using Data to Influence Classroom Decisions



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Why Is Data Important?

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) holds states, districts and schools accountable for student achievement. NCLB requires regular assessments to mark progress and highlight weaknesses in core academic subjects. These assessment results must be reported in the aggregate as well as disaggregated (separated) by individual subgroups of students (low-income or disability status, race or ethnicity).

- **Districts** can use information provided from state and local assessments to determine needs and target resources.
- **Schools** can use information from state and local assessments to provide appropriate professional development for teachers and help to meet the needs of all subgroups of students.
- **Teachers** can use information from assessments required under NCLB to inform classroom decisions and provide the best possible instruction for student learning so that all students succeed.
- **Parents** have access to regular school, district and state report cards, so they may monitor progress and make informed decisions.

Effective teachers use data daily to inform their decisions. One of the most important aspects of good teaching, as many teachers know, is the ability to discern which students are learning and which are not, and then to tailor instruction to meet individual learning needs.

Research shows that teachers who use student test performance to guide and improve their teaching are more effective than teachers who do not use such information. For example, one study demonstrates that achievement in mathematics for low-performing students accelerated when teachers received weekly summaries and performance graphs of their students' performance (Fuchs, L. S., Fuchs, D., Hamlett, C. L., Phillips, N. B., and Bentz, J., 1994. Classwide curriculum-based measurement: Helping general educators meet the challenge of student diversity. *Exceptional Children*, 60, 518-537.)

While testing is an important part of measuring progress, how teachers use the resulting data from test results to drive instruction is critical. Teachers have the opportunity to use data from assessments to make good decisions when adapting instruction, evaluating progress, highlighting successes and improving weaknesses.

Standardized Assessment

Standardized assessments are professionally developed tests administered under standard conditions, producing scores that can be used to evaluate programs or children. The type of standardized test required by NCLB is designed to determine whether children within a state are meeting the state standards of learning for their grade and subject. These assessments start with decisions at the state level about what a fourth-grader, for example, should know and be able to do in mathematics by the end of the fourth grade. Next, questions are developed that are aligned with these standards. After children take the test and it is scored, a report is generated that indicates not only whether the child scored well enough to pass the state standard but also how well the child performed in each area of mathematics tested. Score reports also indicate how children within each tested grade in each school performed, how districts performed, and how children across the state performed. NCLB requires that scores for schools and districts be disaggregated so that the performance of children from different subgroups can be examined. Standardized tests aligned with state standards are essential for administrators to determine whether schools are meeting their goals under NCLB.

Classroom Example:

An eighth-grade math teacher in Texas collects and records the scores his entering students received at the end of seventh grade on the math section of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills. By studying these results, he is able to identify children who may need extra help to succeed. He records the same students' scores at the end of the eighth-grade school year. By comparing the two sets of scores, the teacher can see with which students he had the most success. He also compares the end-of-the-year average score for his whole class with the scores for all the eighth-grade students in his school, in his district, and across the state.

Dynamic Assessment

Dynamic assessments are embedded in ongoing instruction in the classroom. Teachers assess individual students according to their instructional goals during teaching and learning interactions. Teachers conduct these assessments frequently and keep a systematic record of how individual children perform. They use this information to tailor and shape instruction to the needs of children in the class, as well as to measure their progress against instructional goals.

Screening Assessment

Screening assessments are given to all children at the beginning of the class or school year. The purpose is to identify children who may have difficulties in a subject area. These difficulties need to be addressed if they are going to succeed. Screening tests are short and involve questions that probe for the presence of basic skills and abilities.

Classroom Example:

A fourth-grade teacher in Minnesota always begins the year by meeting with each student individually and having the student read aloud for a minute from the page of a book they will read later in the year. She performs an individual reading analysis, focusing on each student's fluency and decoding abilities. She carefully notes how many words each student reads per minute, his or her accuracy and fluency, and whether or not he or she reads with expression. She knows that those who struggle in this exercise are likely to be struggling readers who are not ready for the academic tasks of their peers. She works with them over the first few weeks of class to increase their skills.

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Web Resources

www.ed.gov
The U.S. Department of Education Web site.

www.ed.gov/free
Teaching and learning resources for teachers.

www.nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard
The Nation's Report Card Web site provides information about the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test results across the country.

www.nc4ea.org
The National Center for Educational Accountability is a collaborative effort to improve learning through the effective use of school and student data and the identification of best practices.

http://3d2know.cosn.org/publications/index.html
The Consortium for School Networking's publication on data driven decision-making: *Vision to Know and Do: The Power of Data as a Tool in Educational Decision Making.*

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